



PBL-BioAfrica

21st century skills – the way to get employed?



By HAMK Beat on 15.3.2023

“The workshop was of huge benefit to me because it helped me realize that I need to be creative and innovative” – Feedback from the [AGS co-creation and innovation](#) workshop. *“We first look at your social media,”* answered the Director of [Bongohive](#) Zambia when asked how they recruit new experts. He continued that social media tells with whom you liaise and with whom you can work with.

The reply might have surprised the students who participated to the AGS co-creation and innovation workshop, organized by Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK) in Lusaka, Zambia.

Students, their parents and even teachers often assume that only good grades are the route to employment. But is it really so? Do the highest grades on graduation certificates



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imply that the young expert will perform well?. And what are the qualifications that in the end convince employers?

In a workshop in Kenya, one of the [HAMK in Africa](#) project coordinators emphasized that many job applicants have good grades. Applicants should have something more to offer to stand out and arouse the interest of the potential employer.

Also, the Bongohive example emphasizes that employers are asking for more than academic qualifications. The right attitude, strong initiative taking, collaboration skills, creativity and innovativeness, as well as personal values, are some of the attributes appreciated by employers. If graduates do not possess these competencies, they may end up having difficulties in finding jobs and being employed.

Yet, most academic curricula focus mainly on content knowledge and its creation. Teachers often even feel troubled finding enough time to teach all relevant theories to students. This knowledge-driven education may lead to a contradiction between the needs of the world of work and the competences educational institutions equip their graduates with.

If the curricula and related teaching methods do not equip students with the 21st-century skills demanded by the world of work, students can turn to extra-curricular activities to acquire these competences. The director of Bongohive encouraged students to engage in activities such as student unions, project work and volunteer work. Basically, any activities that can demonstrate to the employer that the applicant has also [generic skills](#). On an institutional level – and for better sustainability – the solution would be curricula where learning outcomes are carefully structured to capture all the elements of competence in a balanced way. Teaching approaches and methods should then support this.

In HAMK-coordinated [PBL-BioAfrica](#), problem-based learning (PBL) is introduced and promoted in Kenya and Zambia as a method to produce employable graduates. In PBL methodology collaboration with industry and societal stakeholders allow students to learn



through authentic cases, and to apply theory in order to find solutions to real-life problems. Cooperation with the world of work helps to develop the right professional attitudes and competences, provides networking opportunities and links the students to the communities of practice.

The PBL-BioAfrica project's [student challenges](#) utilizing the PBL approach, as well as the AGS programme with collaboration between students and companies, have been an eye-opener to many students and teachers alike. The concept of learning through company collaboration has been new to many of the students, and at first, the students did not quite know what to expect. The feedback, however, has demonstrated that students have fully understood the benefits of and appreciate the concept. After the AGS programme, the University of Zambia students even launched an association to help students to get contacts with companies. University of Zambia's student's perceptions of the company collaboration and on the association can be listened in [this video](#).

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